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ABSTRACT

The relationship between adult educators' disciplinary and pedagogic identities was explored through case studies of two adult educators. Both were males. One became an adult educator after spending 15 years as a social worker and social work trainer, and the other became a part-time adult educator after being a chartered surveyor. The former social worker stated that he continues to "trade on" his social work identity as a means of gaining credibility with some of his students but that he has become increasingly detached from some of the current received wisdom of the profession. Although he takes his teaching very seriously, he does not believe that he has made a transition into the pedagogic community of adult education. The former surveyor also takes his teaching very seriously; however, he conceives of it principally as the nurturing of a relationship with his students and as inducting them into the possibility of taking a more holistic approach to their own lives rather than feeling themselves to be labeled or constrained by their current course. The different approaches of both teachers was called into question a number of the assumptions underpinning the idea of a dimension along which disciplinary and pedagogic identities can be seen as in some way opposed. (11 references) (MN)

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Making Meanings: Exploring Teachers' Thinking in Adult Education

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Abstract: In this paper, we use two case studies of teachers to explore the relationship between disciplinary and pedagogic identities.

Why explore teachers' thinking about pedagogic identity?

The work from which this paper is derived emerges from a previous literature-based research study (Zukas and Malcolm, 2002), in which we examined the paucity of connections between the pedagogic traditions and practices of adult and further education, and the developing body of 'received wisdom' on higher education teaching. Using the framework developed in that study as a basis for analysis, we are now engaged in an empirical study of the ways in which educators conceive of themselves, and exploring perceptions of the impact of different factors, such as teacher education, institutional cultures and the ideologies of quality assurance, on pedagogic identity construction.

In our previous work, we developed nine dimensions of pedagogic identity (Zukas and Malcolm, 2002). We are currently exploring ways in which these dimensions relate to teacher perceptions and to the associated and growing literature on teacher identity. In this paper, we focus on the little-researched issue of discipline in relation to teacher identity. The structure and focus of the research naturally draws and builds upon previous researchers' work on 'getting into teachers' heads'. Pratt et al (1998) and Brookfield (1994) are obviously some of the major contributors to the field within adult education, and within the fields of school education and higher education the issue of teacher identity has been under scrutiny for some time (e.g. Clandinin and Connelly, 1996; Edwards, 2001, Walker, 2001). However, there is little existing work on the ways in which disciplinary identity interacts with and informs pedagogic identity.

The data gathered for the present study, which is still in progress, are in the form of verbatim transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, carried out as part of a series of pilot case-studies. During the interviews the teachers, working in different institutional contexts and with varying amounts of teaching experience, were encouraged to talk about how they saw themselves as teachers, and what had influenced the development of their pedagogic identity. Our previous work had been abstract and theoretical, though rooted in our own experience and understandings of practice; our concern now was to begin to explore how teachers other than ourselves think about the matters we had been exploring. The theoretical and exploratory work was an essential precursor to any empirical investigation; as Willis (2000) says, '... the preparation for and entry to the field is, unrecognised or not, some kind of intervention into debate, an attempt to grapple with a puzzle ... whose temper and pace leads you to want to encounter others who bear moving parts of the puzzle. This brings along with it, implicitly or explicitly, some sort of 'theoretical confession', a world view within which the puzzle is meaningful.' (p. 113) This world view can be gleaned in more detail from our previous writing; clearly, the process of research will contribute to its further development.

We have selected two respondents here for a more detailed attempt to locate their perceptions in relation to the chosen dimension. The teachers described in this paper are both men, and were interviewed at very different stages of their respective careers. Neil is in his late forties, and worked for fifteen years as a social worker and social work trainer before becoming a

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university adult educator ten years ago, at a fairly traditional, research-led university. He continues to teach in the field of child welfare and 'human service' professional development. James is 36 and only began teaching two years ago on a part-time basis, but has previously worked in property management as a chartered surveyor, and in sports, both as player and coach. He is now teaching sports science, still part-time, at higher education level to young adult students in a further education college.

Disciplinary community <———————————> Pedagogic community

This dimension was originally formulated as a way of expressing one of the divergences between pedagogic thought in adult and higher education. Higher education teachers have traditionally conceived of themselves as members of a disciplinary community, and disciplinary research has been a more explicit and more highly-valued element of academic work than pedagogy (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000). Within adult education, however, the knowledge-content of and between disciplines has been interrogated, precisely because the crucial pedagogic role of adult educators could not be divorced from the content of teaching. Adult educators have had to question the content and purpose of their discipline through their teaching as much as through their research, enabling them to inhabit 'knowledge-practice' communities which are simultaneously (inter-) disciplinary *and* pedagogic. One of our criticisms of much of the current literature on teaching and learning in higher education was that the abstraction of pedagogic from disciplinary concerns ignored the role of teaching as a form of knowledge production, and divorced the social purpose of higher education from action in the classroom.

Neil's long career in social work might be expected to have anchored him quite firmly in a professional/ disciplinary community, but this affiliation has apparently been weakened by his move into university adult education:

'I still carry a social work identity, so I'd say, probably 30/40% I feel I'm still a social worker and whatever's left, 50/60% I think of myself as an academic ...'

He feels that he continues to 'trade on' his social work identity as a means of gaining credibility with some of his students who are mid-career professionals, but has become increasingly detached from some of the current received wisdom of the profession which jars with his critical and analytic academic approach:

'I am detached, for various political reasons ... there's an awful phrase in social work that I'm trying to resist, which is 'anti-discriminatory practice'... and it's been reduced to ADP ... 'oh, I do ADP', as if it's the easiest thing in the world. So I'm trying to distance myself from that, because I think it's reductionist and simplistic.'

Neil is quite clear about the limited extent to which he can continue to identify with his professional community, and the way in which his move into teaching has complicated the relationship between disciplinary and pedagogic identities. However, although Neil takes his teaching very seriously indeed, and explains in detail how he takes decisions about pedagogic approaches, he does not feel he has made a transition into the pedagogic community of adult education.

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'No, because of being in a specific discipline but within adult education. It's a professional weakness for me actually, because if I was teaching in social work, I'd be going to all the social work conferences ... I overcome that [by doing a lot of] external examining ... and it means I've got a profile in social work ... that's my only link in to a community of interest round social work teaching ... a community of externals!'

His detachment from social work as an academic discipline is, however, strongly informed by a pedagogical student focus which may come from his location within and identification with adult education:

'I really value teaching ... you get loads of status from saying 'I got a £200,000 research grant', and not much status from saying 'I just taught a good class to thirty people'. I think students sometimes get a bad deal, you know they come because they've heard of [distinguished professor] *or whoever, and then he's 100% bought out on research, and I really think that's a bad deal'.*

James faces a different situation. He has in effect had two professional careers and has actually completed two bachelor's degrees at various stages in his life. He has now given up his 'straight' career in chartered surveying – a move which he describes as having *'bailed out of the rat-race'* - and is now teaching sports science part-time, having also 'retired' from his substantial amateur sporting career three years ago. However he does not appear to identify himself as belonging to any particular community in respect of these areas of work. Instead, he sees these different activities as aspects or manifestations of himself. When asked if he sees himself primarily as a teacher now, he responds:

'I'm still in that transitional phase ... It is a difficult question. In an informal sense of the word teacher, that's kind of been the role I've found myself in, in my life ... That's something that I feel is almost part of me, whether it's a socialised thing, a learned thing ...'

What is remarkable – to us - about James' approach is the highly individualised understanding he has of human activity, whether it be his previous professional roles or his new role as a novice teacher. He is attending a course of teacher education, but sees this not so much as an induction into a professional community, as

'... expanding my own understanding of the world ... [giving] me a context for it. Without doing the PGCE [teaching qualification] *I would be a bit short on the structure of 'this is how society sees a teacher', and I want that. I also want what I see as a teacher, and* [to] *integrate the two'.*

Like Neil, James takes his teaching very seriously but he conceives of it principally as the nurturing of a relationship with his students, and in a sense, inducting them into the possibility of taking a more holistic approach to their own lives, rather than feeling themselves to be labelled or constrained by the type of course they are on. He is very much on the edge of the institution as a part-time teacher, but there is evidence that he may be becoming assimilated into a work team, not least through the process of external course review:

'Previously I'd gone in and felt outside the institution to a degree – gone in, done my session, just interacted when I had to. I've had more teaching this week, and more meetings, and I'm kind of more part of it ... this week with the QAA [external quality assurance], *it's probably the first time this year ... that I've felt part of a team that just pulled it all together.'*

The different approaches of these two teachers calls into question a number of the assumptions underpinning our idea of a dimension along which disciplinary and pedagogic identities can be seen as in some way opposed. This dimension is predicated on a particular idea of community which may be less and less meaningful to younger teachers. Like James, they may be pursuing complicated 'portfolio' careers which do not give them a clear affinity with any particular discipline or occupational specialism. In addition, the disciplinary edifices which have loomed over higher education for so long and which have been a major marker of identity for teachers, have been crumbling unevenly for some time now. Work roles in education are also increasingly fragmented and individualised because of part-time teaching, weighty and bureaucratic management structures and the loss of the 'course team' ethos in a context where both content and processes in teaching are subject to more and more external determination. As Billett points out, 'workplace experiences are ... not informal, they are a product of the historical-cultural practices and situational factors that constitute the work practice and its enactment. They also shape individuals' engagement in that practice and how individuals construe and learn from what is afforded by the workplace' (Billett, 2001). For James, the teaching workplace within a further education college is offering a specific and perhaps increasingly common 'workplace pedagogy' in which he is construed as an individual performer of certain specified professional tasks – tasks which are now officially broken down into a series of teaching competences (FENTO 1999).

Although he professes a 'holistic' ontology in which everything is connected and it is impossible to disconnect teaching from other aspects of life, this view of the world is inextricably bound up with his individualised conception of self:

'I would say that ultimately I see myself as an individual, and that I'm doing something for me and these skills will go with me, wherever I am, and ultimately it's going to be 'James', and not teaching as a profession, that will identify me ... This is my life and I will – I will be happy.'

It is ironic that the first glimmerings of a community identity which James is able to discern should come through the onerous process of external quality assurance – a process which has been widely criticised for its negative impact on both the quality of education and on professional autonomy and trust. The reason that James' team has had to pull together is because the institution is so heavily dependent on having its teaching graded 'good' under the specific criteria currently in use – not because the process is good for teachers or for students. He is working within a context where established communities of pedagogic practice have been disrupted and transformed by the imposition of understandings and practices rooted outside pedagogy (Armstrong 2002). Since the institutional culture will shape him as much as the learning or doing of teaching, this will doubtless have implications for his developing pedagogic identity.

For Neil on the other hand, there is a clear awareness of the *existence* of certain communities of practice. In his case they are social work as a professional practice, social work as an academic practice and adult education as a pedagogic practice. The workplace in which he

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finds himself has a collective understanding of itself as an adult education community (rather than as a discipline-based department), and his previous professional career occurred in a consciously principled, boundaried and service-oriented community of practice. Although he says that he does not feel himself now to be a full member of any of these communities, but a fairly peripheral member of each, it is evident that his location within university adult education has influenced his view of social work, and he identifies himself quite strongly with certain adult education values such as participation. At the same time, his social work background informs his approach to teaching:

'There's a sort of social-worky word which I do use a lot, which is empathy ... I think 'I am the student in this session, what am I going to get out of this session, is it going to keep me engaged ...' and I do use that empathy test quite a lot actually, I imagine I'm sat in the class ... I'd say that was a key idea actually'.

There has been, in effect, a merging of the values of different communities of practice in the development of Neil's pedagogic identity, but this is experienced by him (and, we would contend, by many other teachers) as a loss.

Neither of these teachers has a clear or exclusive affiliation with either a disciplinary or pedagogic community, but the reasons for their peripherality or detachment are apparently much more complex than we had thought. Neil retains an affinity with discipline, and it has informed the way in which he has developed; but institutional culture has forced him to detach from that discipline. James has never been affiliated with a discipline. He has taken elements of disciplines to build up a portfolio of interests. Working within further education, he has fewer opportunities to further develop his disciplinary identity and is unlikely to be encouraged so to do, given further education's current pedagogical practices.

So, to return to our original dimension in which we counterposed disciplinary and pedagogic community, we have learnt from Neil and James that these identities are partial, fragmentary and impermanent. to return to Willis'' notion of the puzzle we, and perhaps other adult education researchers, need to reformulate our own puzzle, rather than solve it:

'Of course, the biggest language question of all concerns its uses in the 'writing methodologies' of final write up. Language can never be a mirror of reality, and ... the final written account can only be a product of the researcher's own sensibility (including its forming puzzles and theories) as it encounters another set of practices and practical theories among agents.' (Willis, 2000, p. 116)

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